

Coos Bay Range Lights

In 1896 Congress appropriated \$500 to establish post and range lights at Coos Bay to guide ships from the bar to berthing areas in the upper bay in the vicinity of Empire City, North Bend, and Marshfield (USLHS 1896:167). The lights were established on June 15, 1897 and consisted of five--four in the vicinity of the North Spit:

- ▲ Coos Bay entrance range light, front
- ▲ Coos Bay entrance range light, rear (45 feet above the water)
- ▲ Coos Bay inside range light, front
- ▲ Coos Bay inside range light, rear (65 feet above the water)

The fifth range light was "Pony Bend," a structure with a light twelve feet above the water (USLHS 1897:182).

In January, 1899, two additional range lights were established on Coos Bay (USLHS 1899:188). In 1901 as commerce continued to develop on the estuary and dredging opened the upper bay to larger draft ships, the U.S. Light-House Service established the Stave Mill, Upper, and Marshfield range lights (USLHS 1901:212).

The Coos Bay range lights, including those in the vicinity of the North Spit, were initially kerosene-powered lanterns. In 1911 Nils Peter Adamson, a native of Lomma, Sweden, took over the administration of the lights (Figure 43). Adamson immigrated to the United States in 1884, sailing through the Indian Ocean to Australia and then to San Francisco. In 1894 he entered the U.S. Life-Saving Service as an oarsman at Cape Disappointment, Washington. On July 3, 1903, he became assistant keeper at Southeast Five Finger Island Lighthouse in Frederick Sound, Alaska. In 1905 he was named assistant at Desdamona Sands Lighthouse, a station on a sandbar in the mouth of the Columbia. On May 14, 1906, he was named head keeper of

Eldred Rock Lighthouse at the mouth of the Chilkat River in the Lynn Canal in southeast Alaska. Following the drowning of his two assistant keepers on February 27, 1910, Adamson considered finding a new position. On January 5, 1911, he resigned his post at Eldred Rock, came to Astoria, Oregon, where he married, and moved to Coos Bay, Oregon (Adamson and Adamson 1889-1963).



Fig. 43. Nils Peter Adamson in U.S. Life-Saving Service uniform (Adamson Papers).

Nils Adamson became the keeper of the Coos Bay range lights in September, 1911. His responsibilities included the construction and

maintenance of the light stations on the North Spit, those surrounding the harbor entrance, and others along the length of the shipping channel to the mouth of Isthmus Slough. He also replenished kerosene supplies, erected channel markers, and, in time, transformed the lights to acid-operated, battery-powered facilities. Adamson retired in 1934 from the U.S. Coast Guard and was succeeded by his son, Chester Nils Adamson (Figure 44). When the younger Adamson took over the task, the U.S. Coast Guard maintained thirty-eight kerosene and electric-lighted aids to navigation on Coos Bay. Chester Adamson held the job until his retirement in 1976, a tenure of sixty-five years by a father and a son. In 1976 the bay had sixty-seven electric lights and fixed aids to navigation. Chester Adamson was among the last three civilian employees of the U.S. Coast Guard at his retirement. A crew of three men took over his responsibilities and moved the keeper's station from his dock on the Coos Bay waterfront to the Coast Guard facility at Charleston (Anonymous 1976; Beckham 1998).



Fig. 44. Nils Peter Adamson and Chester Nils Adamson (boy) in the the *Hilma*, the tender, ca. 1917 (Adamson Papers).